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# ROBERT GWYN AND ROBERT PERSONS: WELSH AND ENGLISH PERSPECTIVES ON ATTENDANCE AT ANGLICAN SERVICE

by JAMES JANUARY-MCCANN

This article compares and contrasts the 1580 texts *A briefe discours contayning certayne reasons why Catholiques refuse to goe to Church* by Robert Persons, and *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd* by Robert Gwyn. Both books deal with church papism, and were written whilst the authors were in Rome together. Despite the similarity of theme, and the fact that the two most likely consulted each other about the work, many significant differences remain between the two texts. This article seeks to discuss these differences, and to assess what conclusions can be inferred from them as to the relative conditions of English and Welsh Catholicism, and the effect that this had on the authors' work.

Robert Gwyn of Penyberrth in Penllŷn (d. c.1603) was a Welsh seminary priest, trained at the English College at Douai. He spent much of his life on the mission in Wales, and rose to become one of the most senior Welsh missionary priests. As part of his mission, he was a prolific author and translator of Welsh language Catholic texts, one of which was *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd*, an explanation for Catholics of the inadmissibility of attending Anglican service, which Gwyn wrote whilst in Rome in the company of Robert Persons, the noted Jesuit polemicist. Persons was himself at the time writing *A briefe discovrs contayning certayne reasons why Catholiques refuse to goe to Church*, which treats of the same subject matter. This paper attempts to trace the connections between Gwyn and Persons and the similarities and differences between their books, and to draw what conclusions can be inferred from these as to the differing natures of Welsh and English Catholic experiences during this period, and of the respective needs of the two missions.

Wales and England had both officially reverted to Protestantism upon the ascent of Elizabeth I to the throne in 1558. Despite this, many people in both countries remained Catholic, most covertly, a few overtly. Catholic survival tended to crystallise around those gentry families who remained loyal, and who often provided a refuge for priests, and a location for saying Mass. Due in part to the relative ineffectiveness of contemporary governmental power, it was easier to maintain a Catholic

presence in areas geographically removed from London, and in remote areas far from the gaze of the Anglican bishops. The removal of Latin as the liturgical language, and its replacement by English may well have widened the appeal of the new religion in England, but in Wales all that occurred was the replacement of one, widely accepted unintelligible language with another, less accepted one. The failure early on in Elizabeth's reign to take into account the differing linguistic needs of Wales, and the country's remoteness from London, both geographically and culturally, meant that Catholicism would retain at least a nominal hold in Wales for many years. One particularly strongly Catholic area was the Llŷn peninsula in North West Wales, the home of Robert Gwyn, one of the more prolific Welsh writers of the sixteenth century. The conservative religious nature of the area was aided both by its mountainous nature, which precluded easy access by the bishop of Bangor, and the Catholic leanings of several of the leading families, notably the Owens of Plas Du, Llanarmon.

Robert Gwyn was ordained priest in 1575 – the year Robert Persons entered the Society of Jesus – at Douai, where he had been a student since leaving his native Llŷn in 1571.<sup>1</sup> Persons was later ordained at Rome in 1580. It was the custom for British priests and seminarians exiled on the continent at the time, particularly those at Douai<sup>2</sup> under the tutelage of Cardinal Allen, to write letters and treatises to their families and friends at home in order to strengthen them in the Faith, and to persuade those who had conformed to the Established Church to return to the old religion. These were often printed and distributed, or circulated in manuscript form. Gwyn and Persons too followed this established practice.

Wales during this period was an almost entirely rural society, with only a very few small towns. This, coupled with the country's remoteness and small, scattered population, meant that Welsh-language printing was almost non-existent, and what little was produced was almost entirely from presses in London. Despite this, Wales had an indigenous, highly literate class, the bards, whose function was to immortalise their patrons, both lay and ecclesiastical, through their poetry. In order to do this they were able to draw on the expertise of an established body of experienced scribes capable of copying their poems for distribution amongst their patrons. As a result of this established scribal tradition in Wales, and of the lack of opportunity for printing Welsh books, those Catholic texts written in Welsh were generally, but not exclusively, copied and circulated as manuscripts. Of these letters we know that Gwyn wrote at least four, of which two have survived, *Na all fod vn Ffydd onyd yr Hen Ffydd* (1574),<sup>3</sup> a defence of the Catholic Church's claim to be the One True Faith, and *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd*,<sup>4</sup> the latter written, as textual evidence shows, in 1580 at Rome,<sup>5</sup> which sets down the reasons why Catholics should not attend their local Protestant church, despite the heavy punishments for recusancy.<sup>6</sup>

The late Geraint Bowen, lecturer in Welsh at Aberystwyth, and editor of two of Gwyn's texts,<sup>7</sup> believed Gwyn to have been in Rome in the company of Persons and St. Edmund Campion, when they left for England in April of that year as part of the Jesuit Mission.<sup>8</sup> In October 1580, when Persons and Campion met again at the house of William Griffith Llancarfan,<sup>9</sup> in Uxbridge, at which Gwyn was also present.<sup>10</sup> It would seem reasonable to assume therefore that the three travelled together from Rome to England, and thereafter separated before coming together once again in Uxbridge.

At the Synod Southwark, which was convened by Persons, Campion and their fellow Jesuits shortly after they landed in order to coordinate with the secular clergy, the matter of attendance at Anglican service was discussed. Campion and Persons sternly insisted on total non-compliance with the law and shortly afterwards Persons published *A brief discovrs contayning certayne reasons why Catholiques refuse to goe to Church* from a secret press in London.<sup>11</sup> However, the text states that Persons had dispatched a friend from Rome to England with a copy of the text, which was to be smuggled into the country. This would suggest that the Synod was convened as a result of Persons's deliberations whilst writing it. It also makes it possible that he consulted with Gwyn whilst working on it, since he would have been aware that Gwyn was working on a similar text in Welsh. Whether or not this putative consultation took place, there are interesting differences, as well as similarities between the two texts.

Both writers identify their target audience, and in doing so both differentiate between two types within the Catholic community in Wales and England. Gwyn's criteria for such a differentiation differ from those of Persons. Gwyn states that there are two types of people amongst his countrymen – thus implying that all Welshmen are Catholics – those who are not aware that attendance at service is a sin and those who are aware, but who are under the impression that they can gain God's forgiveness at the moment of death. He directs the first part of the text, that which deals with the issue of church papism, towards the first group; the second part, a series of exempla showing the importance of not waiting till one's deathbed before making one's confession, is directed at the second group.<sup>12</sup> Persons, by contrast, identifies two types of Catholic in England: those who know it a sin to attend Protestant church services and yet do so, and those who attend purely in order to avoid persecution and to demonstrate their loyalty to the state. His treatise is written for the latter group.<sup>13</sup>

A close reading of both texts reveals both similarities and differences. The first and most obvious difference between the two texts is that Gwyn considers himself to be writing to his countrymen as a whole, despite the text being addressed in the first place to his family.<sup>14</sup> Persons, on the other hand, addresses only those of his fellow Englishmen who remain Catholic, and specifically those who outwardly conform to the

established Church. These disparate audiences would seem to reflect the writers' views of the contemporary religious situation in their homelands, with Gwyn perceiving Catholicism to be the religion adhered to by the vast majority in Wales,<sup>15</sup> in contrast to England where he notes there are not only Catholics, whom he argues make up the largest group, but also 'Protestants, Puritans and Householders of Love'.<sup>16</sup> The second part of *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd*, the exempla, which Gwyn uses to demonstrate the importance of not relying on the hope that it will be possible to make death-bed repentance for having attended Protestant services, contributes somewhat less to his arguments for recusancy and so need not concern us here, but those interested in the light it sheds on Gwyn's family and acquaintances in Llŷn are directed to Geraint Bowen's edition of the text.<sup>17</sup>

Gwyn exhorts his listeners not to associate with heretics. He argues that if, as St. John taught, we should not even greet a heretic when we meet one, then it is even more imperative that we should avoid their services, since attendance at them is a greater sign of association than merely greeting someone in the street.<sup>18</sup> Both writers argue that to attend an Anglican service is to take a great risk since it is heretical and those who take part in it are sure to be punished by God for doing so. Persons is of course well-known as a hardliner in this matter, as can be deduced from his arguments throughout this text, and from the position he took on it at the Synod of Southwark.<sup>19</sup> Gwyn's own work clearly indicates that he shared Persons's opinion; indeed textual evidence from his earlier 1574 shows us that he had held this view at least from his days at the seminary in Douai:

Wrth hyn y rydych yn deallt os mynwech y goryd ych llyged y weled na ellwech mywn modd yny byd fyned y wrando y brygawthen hwy am na does fodd y neb folianny duw fel y dlye ond ynghytyndeb yr eglwys gatholig.<sup>20</sup>

From this you understand if you will but open your eyes to see that you cannot on any account go to listen to their babbling for the only way for anyone to praise God as they should is in the communion of the Catholic Church.

The religious upheavals of the sixteenth century had led to a broader spectrum of religious adherence amongst the people of England and Wales than the seemingly binary opposition of Catholic and Protestant would seem to suggest. Required by law to attend their local – now Anglican – parish church, the population found themselves obliged to attend the ceremonies of a religion for which many of them did not feel any affection and, in many cases, positively abhorred. They had little practical choice other than conformity however, as refusal was punished by fines, and later imprisonment. This led to the practice of church papism by large numbers of people who attended their parish church with varying degrees of regularity, in order to satisfy the State's demand.<sup>21</sup> Many of these also attended Masses wherever possible, or found other

ways to keep their Catholic practice alive. Alexandra Walsham argues in her *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (1999) that we should not view recusancy as the core, authentic Catholic experience during this period, but as the extreme end of a spectrum of Catholic allegiance spanning those who refused to attend church at all, to those who eagerly received both Protestant and Catholic communion.<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note here that Gwyn does not encourage people to stay away from church for fear that they might be contaminated by heresy. Rather, he takes the view that Catholics should have nothing at all to do with Protestantism, since it has been formally proclaimed by the Church to be heretical. Gwyn draws on teaching from the Bible and the Church Fathers to support his argument,<sup>23</sup> and reiterates this forcefully and at length in *Na all fod vn Ffydd onyd yr Hen Ffydd*, and in *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd*, where he warns that a Catholic should at all times follow the commandments and teachings of the Church, even if his own conscience would lead him to take a contrary view.<sup>24</sup> Since the Church, having ruled at the Council of Trent that Protestantism is heretical,<sup>25</sup> it is self-explanatory, he argues, that their services should be shunned. He seeks to persuade his listeners that Anglicans are indeed heretics, and therefore that the Church's pronouncements on this matter should be obeyed. The judgment of each individual Catholic's conscience is irrelevant to him.

Persons by contrast although equally unyielding states that non-attendance is a matter of conscience. 'I perswading my selfe their doctrine to be false doctrine, and consequently venomous unto the hearer, I may not venture my soul to be infected with the same.'<sup>26</sup> Notice that it is his conscience, not the decree of the Church as promulgated by the Council of Trent which has led him to advocate non-attendance. It should be noted however that Persons takes pains to explain why the Council had not specifically banned attendance at Protestant services at first. He says that this is because the Council had definitively declared Protestantism heretical, and that therefore, following the past example of Catholics when faced with historical heresies, it was self-explanatory that a Catholic could not attend an Anglican church service, as heretics were at all costs to be avoided. In his view, the point did not need to be stated, as it was readily understood by everyone.<sup>27</sup>

This emphasis on conscience is a feature of the text, with Persons arguing that sinning against one's conscience is a sin against the Holy Spirit, and using the Gospels as evidence.<sup>28</sup> Indeed he quotes St. Mark, stating that 'he that sinneth against the Holy Ghost, shal neuer be forgeuen nether in this worlde, nether in the worlde to come.'<sup>29</sup> Persons here condemns the Protestants not so much for their dissent from the teachings of the Catholic Church, and their enforcing of that dissent upon Catholics, as for their insistence in forcing the Catholics to go against

their consciences by taking part in religious ceremonies they feel to be wrong.

...then in what miserable case standeth many a man in England, at this day which take othes, receaue sacrame[n]ts, goe to church, and co[m]mit many a like act directly against their owne consciences, and against their owne knowledg: nay, what a case doe thei sta[n]d in which know such things to be directly against other mens consciences, and yet doe compell them to doe it.<sup>30</sup>

Gwyn by contrast sees things as more black and white: Protestants are heretics, the Church says to shun them, so therefore Catholics must obey the Church. The precise nature of the sin in which those who attend church, and those who compel them to attend is irrelevant, attendance is a sin and therefore to be avoided. Gwyn's inflexible stance here could perhaps be seen as the zeal of the convert, seeking to atone for his past errors of having been raised Protestant and taken the Oath of Supremacy on graduating from Corpus Christi, Oxford in 1568. He only became a Catholic shortly before taking ship for Douai in 1571, under the influence of Fr. Robert Owen, of Plas-du in Llanarmon,<sup>31</sup> the brother of Thomas Owen, a Caernarvonshire squire and recusant who would later shelter Gwyn when he returned to North Wales as a missionary.<sup>32</sup> We can therefore perhaps expect him to be rather more stubborn in his resistance to compromise with the religion he had forsaken than Persons, who came from a largely Catholic family, and may well have been raised Catholic himself.<sup>33</sup> As Gwyn says, 'mi wn yn dda y pericle', (I know the dangers well).<sup>34</sup> It is also possible that his stubbornness on the issue is connected with his failure to convince his family to return to Catholicism during his mission to Llŷn in 1578. Despite his successes at convincing several leading families in the area to absent themselves from church, it does not seem that he ever persuaded his own family to do so, which might account for his insistence on non-attendance in this letter to them two years later.

Persons's emphasis on the inadmissibility of attending church in order to avoid giving scandal to recusant Catholics by appearing to conform, or to Protestants by falsely seeming to be of their religion, is not found in Gwyn. Quite simply, Gwyn's opinion of Protestants, as can be seen by his description of them as 'Opiniadwyr' (*Opinionistes*), 'Darnwyr', (schismatics), and 'bastardied' (bastards), is so low that it is unlikely that he considered their feelings to be of any consequence. One feels upon comparing the two texts, that they have very different aims. Whilst Persons is concerned both with convincing his fellow Catholics to adopt a principled stance of recusancy as a form of religious distinctiveness, and winning toleration of Catholic religious practices from the monarchy, Gwyn's work, as he sees it, is purely to persuade the mass of nominally Catholic Welshmen who, he states, outnumber their Protestant countrymen by four to one, into a full and overt embrace of Tridentine Catholicism.<sup>35</sup> It must be remembered that Protestantism was



at this point more popular in England than in Wales, where it was regularly referred to as *Crefydd y Sais*, the Englishman's religion. Wales, and particularly Gwyn's home territory of Llŷn, was, in addition, very remote from central authority in London and would have been harder to police. It would thus have been easier for Gwyn to take a hard line. Persons, on the other hand, in spite of his strong opinions on the subject, would have had to deal with the State's interference in the lives of its Catholic population far more frequently than would Gwyn in Wales. We can see that although Persons was unbending on the necessity of refraining from attending Protestant service, he was somewhat more nuanced in his arguments as to the reasons for that necessity than was Gwyn.

Both Gwyn and Persons agree that attendance at a Protestant service loses the attendee all benefits of the Catholic religion, which are only shared by those who are in full and open communion with the Church. Persons in particular draws attention to Protestant reduction of the sacraments to two, Baptism and the Eucharist,<sup>36</sup> pointing out that since they only recognise two, the Catholic who attends their churches will lose the benefit of the other five sacraments in physically cutting himself off from the Church.<sup>37</sup> He also calls into question Protestant ideas of 'conformity' claiming that the vast majority of ministers adhere very loosely to the dictates of the prayer book, that each follows these instructions after his own fashion. Consequently there is a lack of uniformity amongst the members of the Established Church itself.<sup>38</sup> That being so, how can they expect conformity from Catholics when they cannot agree upon the system of worship to be used in their service? Continuing Persons's point that even those superficially acceptable parts of the Anglican service are of no avail, either to them or to any Catholics who might be present, Gwyn states that if a heretic were to pray day and night using the same words as the Catholics, God wouldn't listen to his prayers.<sup>39</sup> In arguing against church papism he writes that since God created both body and soul, it is not right to keep the soul for God by remaining inwardly Catholic whilst delivering the body to the Devil by outwardly conforming.<sup>40</sup> He also mentions the Protestants martyred during the reign of Mary, commenting that although they might have thought honestly that they were dying for Christ, the blood of their martyrdom would not wash away the sin they committed by dividing the Church.<sup>41</sup> This would have impressed upon his audience the gravity of their offence, for if by attending church they have *de facto* become Protestants themselves, then their sins too will be equally incapable of remittance through martyrdom.

Gwyn also exhorts his audience to think of example they set for their fellow Catholics in Europe, (an exhortation not too far removed from Persons's desire that English Catholics should avoid causing scandal by their actions). He invites them to consider the reaction of a Catholic arriving in Wales from Rome who sees other Catholics kneeling in reverence during an Anglican sermon. How, he asks, is the stranger to



distinguish between loyal Catholics and heretics, both of whom appear to take part in the service?<sup>42</sup> Returning again to the theme of punishment, he argues that God will not distinguish between them.

Although church papists are attacked in this text, they are also provided with an alternative to conformity. At the end of his chapter on the non-existence of salvation outside the Catholic Church, Gwyn suggests that rather than attending the heretical services of the parish church Catholics should instead stay at home and hear Mass there, if they can, or, if this is not possible, they should pray and sing hymns. This, he argues, will enable them to remain in communion with the Church and so gain the benefit of every prayer and Mass that is said throughout the world; benefits which are unavailable to those who have left the unity of the Church.<sup>43</sup> Attending Mass at home would, of course, have necessitated offering shelter to a priest. Gwyn's encouragement of Catholics towards such a course of action points to the greater ease with which central government authority could be avoided in Llŷn – as opposed to the situation in most parts of England – because of the area's remoteness, and the perception of Protestantism as a foreign, English religion. Organised searches for priests, though they did occur, were more infrequent than in areas easily accessible from the capital where convinced Protestants were numerically strong. Similarly in these remote areas Catholic-minded gentry would have found it easier to be appointed magistrates. Thus Gwyn could feel reasonably secure in encouraging his countrymen to hold house Masses without fearing that he was putting them in too much danger.

He was however, not shy about encouraging them to become martyrs.

Am hyny gwybyddwch fod Duw yn edrych am gael genychi farw a diodde myrthyrddod fil o amser pei bai bossibyl yngynt na gwady ych ffydd.<sup>44</sup>

(Therefore know that God seeks for you to die and suffer martyrdom a thousand times if it were possible sooner than to reject your Faith).

Indeed, the fourth chapter of *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd* is devoted to this point. Gwyn states that to attend church against one's conscience is a denial of the Faith, even if one remains a Catholic at heart; providing here the text's only echo of Persons's elevation of the conscience as the arbitrator of religious behaviour. He further argues that to attend against one's conscience makes the Catholic little better than the heretic; the latter, albeit mistakenly, at least attends the service he believes to be correct, whilst the former attends a service he knows to be false. Continuing the subject of the necessity of an open profession of Catholicism – discussed also by Persons – Gwyn uses the example of the story of Eleazar, who in publically choosing martyrdom rather than a false profession of conformity with paganism, acted as an exemplar to his audience. This scriptural precedent and encouragement to martyrdom was also used for the same purpose by Persons,<sup>45</sup> and Gregory Martin.<sup>46</sup> Eleazar's martyrdom is

ascribed to 'perfect love',<sup>47</sup> which is offered as the reason why a Catholic should profess his religion openly and suffer death rather than to repudiate his faith.

The fourth chapter closes with some blunt views on the argument that since the Queen has legislated that everyone, without exception, should attend the parish church, then it is incumbent on everyone to do so, regardless of their own religious convictions, 'ny all Cyfreth fydol rwymo neb y fyned yr llan.'<sup>48</sup> (Temporal law cannot force anyone to go to the parish church). The point Gwyn makes is simple: God's power is above that of any mortal monarch, if the two authorities should come into conflict then it is the higher one which should be obeyed. This section again illustrates the greater freedom afforded to Gwyn, as a result of the remote nature of the area in which his works were circulated, than that afforded to English polemicists. It is also possible that the fact that he wrote in Welsh rather than English ensured that the risk of detection was smaller. However, it should be remembered that despite the imposition of the Act of Union in 1536,<sup>49</sup> most Welsh magistrates and Justices of the Peace, particularly in Gwynedd, would have been Welsh-speaking. While Persons would have had to be more careful about such an utter rejection of the Queen's right to dictate the religion of her subjects, as can be seen in the many protestations of loyalty and ingratiating references to royal authority found in *A brief discovrs*, Gwyn operated at such a geographical and linguistic remove from the centre of Elizabethan power that he was able to be utterly unequivocal about his position on church attendance. Quite simply he was less likely to be apprehended for his views.

This blunt speech is also apparent in his statement that attendance at church is a sin, even if the attendee takes no part in the service, or indeed even if he takes active steps to avoid hearing any of it. Gwyn uses the contrasting example of the man who attends of his own free will but blocks his ears so that he cannot hear the preacher's words, and the man who is carried into the church in chains and forced to listen. As far as Gwyn is concerned the former has sinned because although he might have blocked his ears to the sound of the service, he has still of his own free will attended and thus implicitly consented to being counted as a Protestant. He may well have taken steps to protect himself from heresy but no-one observing him will be aware of this. Instead it will be presumed that he has freely consented to attend the service. This section agrees with Persons's point that since church attendance is 'a sign distinctive'<sup>50</sup> of religious affiliation, anyone who does so is declaring himself a Protestant, even if in his heart he considers himself Catholic. The man in chains, however, has been visibly compelled to attend the service against his will, and presumably through force. Therefore despite the fact that he will be able to hear the service, no-one seeing him would take him for a conforming Protestant, but will instantly recognise him for a loyal Catholic with no desire to be there. Interestingly this is precisely

what happened to the martyr St. Richard Gwyn, who was also dragged to church in Wrexham in chains in May 1581 and made such a nuisance of himself that no-one could hear the sermon. Considering that Robert Gwyn is thought to be responsible for his countryman's conversion, could this passage have been the inspiration for Richard Gwyn's behaviour?

Persons and Gwyn both agree that the new Anglican service is inferior to the Mass, with Gwyn making great play of the fact that the Real Presence, prayers for the dead, and praying to the saints have been left out of the *Book of Common Prayer*. In doing so he takes care several times to emphasise how different the new service is from the old.<sup>51</sup> He notes that even if the two were exactly similar, it would be wrong to attend the new service, and, in particular, to receive the Eucharist, because the minister officiating would no longer be in communion with the Catholic Church. Here we see the continuation of Gwyn's overriding theme in this text: that the reason a Catholic should absent himself from Protestant services is because the Reformers in breaking with Rome have left the unity of the Church. It is this unity which is important to Gwyn, for whom Gwyn the true Catholic is one who at all times remains within that unity and follows the Church's commandments and ordinances, rather than the dictates of his own conscience or the laws of temporal monarchs.

Am hyny gwiliwch, er dim, er marfolaeth, kolli da na dim, wrando ar na brenin, na brenhines, nag vn o honyn yn erbyn dyw.

(Therefore do not for anything, despite death, loss of goods or anything else, listen to king, nor queen, nor one of them against God).<sup>52</sup>

The final important difference between *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd* and *A brief discovrs* is the writers' views on the importance of the role of the monarchy in the situation in which they find themselves. Gwyn mentions Queen Elizabeth once in his entire text, and then only to deny scathingly that she has any right to dictate her subjects' behaviour in matters of religion.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, Persons's text is full of ingratiating references to the Queen's virtues, chiefly mercy and tolerance, and appeals to her to lift her oppressive strictures from the backs of her loyal Catholic subjects.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, he states that it is the Catholic religion which best teaches obedience to temporal rulers, contrasting this with that of Luther and Calvin, quoting them to prove that they, and by inference their Anglican descendants, instead preach that a Christian should not obey his lawful ruler.<sup>55</sup>

This again can be attributed to the differing realities on the ground in England and Wales. Despite the commitment of the North Walian bishops<sup>56</sup> to enforcing religious conformity in their dioceses,<sup>57</sup> the difficult terrain and sparse population of Wales made their job rather harder for them than for their contemporaries in England. The ethnic dimension also cannot be overlooked. Although by this point Wales had been

completely annexed to the kingdom of England, and all Welsh people would have accepted the English monarch as their rightful king or queen, the Welsh remained in all ways a distinctive and separate people, a people who were aware that at one time they had ruled over the whole of Britain, only to lose this monarchy to the invading English. If we consider that at this time there was no such thing as a Welshman who did not speak Welsh and that most Welsh people were monoglot in their own language, the sense of a Welsh identity, part of the kingdom of England, but quite emphatically not English, was very strong. A religion proclaiming itself the 'Church of England' would not therefore have been welcomed with open arms, as can be seen from Gwyn's repeated references to Protestants in his earlier texts not just as 'Gwyr Newydd' (*nouationes*), but as 'Gwyr Newydd o Loygr,' (English *nouationes*). The authority of the English queen therefore, whilst acknowledged and accepted, was always at one remove.

For the English-born Persons however, the relationship was much closer. Not only was Elizabeth his Queen, but she was also his fellow countrywoman, and spoke his language. She and her officers were also geographically closer to him than they were to Gwyn out at the farthest edge of Llŷn. It is therefore to be expected that he would be rather more solicitous of her goodwill than would Gwyn, for he was at rather greater risk of incurring her displeasure. Once again Gwyn's remoteness from central authority in London was his greatest ally.

Whether or not Gwyn and Persons consulted each other and discussed their work whilst in Rome or during the journey back to England, the two texts are reasonably similar. The differences between them lie more in the detail of the severity of their views. As we have seen, it is likely that Gwyn's more hard-line stance on the issue of church papism was facilitated by his geographical and linguistic remove from the possible consequences of his contribution to this debate. Persons might well have agreed with him on many of his points, but would have found it rather more dangerous to do so openly. Yet despite these differences, and Gwyn's more unyielding attitudes, we should not dismiss the similarity of context which both authors' works share. Whilst conditions may not have been quite as harsh for Catholics in the farthest reaches of Wales as they were in the heart of England, Catholicism was still a forbidden and persecuted religion. The fact that Gwyn was drawn to write a letter to his parents on the same theme as many other contemporary English language texts is indicative of the fact that despite their perhaps proportionally greater numerical strength, Welsh Catholics shared their English co-religionists' problems and concerns.

In spite of pronounced English and Welsh cultural differences during this period, it is impossible to separate Welsh and English ecclesiastical issues. *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd* should be read as a Welsh contribution to a

wider English debate, not simply as a part of a discussion on a separate Welsh issue.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gwyn was born c.1545, the younger son of the gentry family of Penyberth on the Llŷn peninsula in Gwynedd. The family seems to have conformed to the Established Church, and Gwyn was sent to Corpus Christi, College, Oxford, from where he graduated in 1568. He was reconciled to Catholicism by Fr. Robert Owen, also a native of Penllŷn, and entered the English College at Douai in 1571. He was ordained priest in 1575, and was back in his native district as a missionary by the following year. Persons (1546–1610), originally from Somerset, was sent to St. Mary's Hall, Oxford in 1562, and became a fellow and tutor of Balliol College in 1568. In 1574 he was forced to resign and fled overseas to Louvain.

<sup>2</sup> The English College at Douai in the Spanish Netherlands was established in 1569 by William Allen, as a seminary to train priests for the English mission.

<sup>3</sup> 'That there can be no Faith but the Old Faith', MS NLW 15542B, pp. 62a–312a, Douai, 1574.

<sup>4</sup> 'The New Men's Service', MS NLW 15542B, pp. 1a–62a, Rome, 1580.

<sup>5</sup> MS NLW 15542B, pp. 41b, 18b.

<sup>6</sup> The 1559 Act of Uniformity of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacrament made church attendance compulsory, and punished non-attendance with fines, initially of a shilling, but later raised to twenty pounds a month. Failure to pay the fines was punished by imprisonment, as were those found guilty of holding or attending private Mass. In 1563 it was also forbidden to defend the Papal Supremacy over the Church, and in 1571 it was proclaimed treason either to publish papal bulls, or to call the monarch a heretic or schismatic.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Gwyn, *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd*, ed., Geraint Bowen, University of Wales Press (Cardiff, 1970), Robert Gwyn, *Y Drych Kristnogawl*, ed., Geraint Bowen, University of Wales Press (Cardiff, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Gwyn, *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd*, ed., Geraint Bowen, p. xxxiii.

<sup>9</sup> From a Glamorganshire recusant family, Griffiths had fled to the continent sometime before 1574, and devoted quite a bit of money to supporting candidates for the priesthood. Whilst in exile Griffiths seems to have become acquainted with Edmund Campion in Padua. His family owned a house near Uxbridge which was chosen by Campion as his base of operations.

<sup>10</sup> *Catholic Record Society*, vol. 39, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Walsham, Alexandra, 'Yielding to the Extremity of the Time': Conformity, Orthodoxy and the Post-Reformation Catholic Community' in Peter Lake and Michael Questier, (eds.) *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560–1660* (The Boydell Press, 2000), p. 214.

<sup>12</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 1a.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Persons, *A brief discours contayning certayne reasons why Catholiques refuse to goe to Church* ([London Secret Press], 1580) (Scolar Press, 1972), STC 19394, A&R 616, p. 6a.

<sup>14</sup> MS NLW 15542B, pp. 19a–19b.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140b–141a.

<sup>16</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, p. iii.

<sup>17</sup> Gwyn, *Gwssanaeth y Gwŷr Newydd*, ed., Geraint Bowen, pp. 40–77.

<sup>18</sup> John 2, 10.

<sup>19</sup> See Leo Hicks, ed., *Letters and Memorials of Father Robert Persons, S.J.: vol. 1 (to 1588)*, Catholic Record Society, vol. 39 (1942).

<sup>20</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 313a.

<sup>21</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (The Boydell Press, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. i–24.

<sup>23</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, PG XX, 338, Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, PG LXXXII, 1150.

<sup>24</sup> MS NLW 15542 B, pp. 193b, 203a.

<sup>25</sup> Council of Trent, Session VI, Canons 1–5.

<sup>26</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, p. 7a.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24b.

<sup>28</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, p. 5b.

<sup>29</sup> Mark 3:29.

- <sup>30</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, p. 5b.
- <sup>31</sup> Gwyn, *Gwssanaeth y Gwyr Newydd*, ed., Geraint Bowen, p. xxviii.
- <sup>32</sup> Thomas Owen was later accused of recusancy by one of his neighbours, among the charges being that ‘Robert Wynn, Robert Owen (brother of the accused), Rees Griffith, David Evans... and other papistical Persons’s lodged at his house. See Geraint Bowen, ‘Robert Gwyn’, in *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions* (1954), p. 20.
- <sup>33</sup> Victor Houliston, ‘Robert Persons, [Parsons] (1546–1610)’, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
- <sup>34</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 19b.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140b–141a.
- <sup>36</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, p. 21a.
- <sup>37</sup> Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, Matrimony.
- <sup>38</sup> *op. cit.*, p. iiiii.
- <sup>39</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 13a.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16b.
- <sup>41</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 15a.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18a.
- <sup>43</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 20a.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20b.
- <sup>45</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, p. K ib.
- <sup>46</sup> Gregory Martin, *Treatise of Schisme* (Douai, 1578), p. D. ii.
- <sup>47</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 24a.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25b.
- <sup>49</sup> As well as formerly incorporating Wales into England, and removing the old distinction between the Marcher Lordships and the Principality of Wales in favour of a system of counties, the Act also banned anyone not fluent in English from holding public office in Wales. Given that the vast majority of the population, even amongst the gentry class were monoglot Welsh during this period, the Act can hardly said to have been widely enforced.
- <sup>50</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, p. 16a.
- <sup>51</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 33b.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26a.
- <sup>53</sup> MS NLW 15542B, p. 25b.
- <sup>54</sup> Persons, *A brief discours*, pp. iia, iva–b, viiia, ixb, xivb–xvia.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viia.
- <sup>56</sup> Bishop Nicholas Robinson of Bangor was particularly zealous in this regard, actively hunting Gwyn on more than one occasion. Gwyn must have been a particular thorn in his side, as before the writer’s return to Llŷn in 1576, Robinson had boasted that there were only six recusants in his entire diocese. Regardless, he was later forced to admit that since the summer of Gwyn’s arrival, several leading families had begun to absent themselves from church, presumably under Gwyn’s influence. See Bowen, ‘Robert Gwyn’, *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions* (1954), p. 20.
- <sup>57</sup> Bowen, ‘Robert Gwyn’, *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions* (1954), p. 20.

